The Struggle for Life

Socio-environmental Conflicts in Mexico

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The global expansion of the neoliberal model is most forcefully expressed in the processes of social, cultural, and environmental predation undertaken by corporations in the so-called Global South. Three pertinent processes are taking place in Mexico: (1) an increase in socio-environmental conflicts, mainly in rural areas and in predominantly indigenous territories; (2) the proliferation of citizen resistance of an essentially communal, municipal, or micro-regional nature; and (3) increased violence against these resistance movements by the government across its three levels (federal, state, and municipal) in complicity (or not) with companies and corporations that are trying to implement projects that damage natural resources, affect the quality of the environment, and destroy cultures and the social fabric.

La expansión mundial del modelo neoliberal se expresa con mayor fuerza en los procesos de depredación ecológica, social y cultural que las corporaciones realizan en el llamado Sur Global. Tres procesos de la realidad mexicana ilustran lo anterior: (1) el creciente aumento de los conflictos socio-ambientales, principalmente en las áreas rurales y predominantemente en los territorios indígenas; (2) la multiplicación de las resistencias ciudadanas, esencialmente de carácter comunitario, municipal o micro-regional; y (3) el aumento de la violencia contra esos movimientos de resistencia, llevados a cabo por gobiernos en sus tres niveles (federal, estatal y municipal) en complicidad (o no) con las empresas y corporaciones que intentan implementar proyectos que dilapidan los recursos naturales y/o la calidad del ambiente y que provocan destrucción de culturas y tejido social.

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Mexico is experiencing a significant increase in socio-environmental conflicts across the length and breadth of its territory, a result of the deployment of a renewed global economic model (neoliberalism) that is expanding

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under a rationale of accumulation by dispossession through extractivism (Gudynas, 2009; Harvey, 2006). This pattern of accumulation is based on the overexploitation of nature and human beings through the expansion of economic boundaries to territories until recently regarded as unproductive or unviable for capital in what has been called the Global South (B. Santos, 2009; Svampa, 2012). Dispossession through ecological devastation has led to what David Harvey has called a "new imperialism," a global geo-policy aimed at controlling hydrocarbons, minerals, biodiversity, land, food, and other strategic goods managed by the Global North (Harvey, 2004).

In this context, the monopolization of land, strategic natural resources, and territories seeks to ensure increased profitability and accumulation, reflecting a new "stateless colonialism" that involves territorial control and occupation by transnational companies, with states remaining owners without sovereignty while inhabitants, cultural practices, ontologies, and knowledge are displaced (B. Santos, 2012). This dispossession is framed by the commodification of all aspects of life through divestment, discrimination, and violence (including environmental violence) and is the current emblematic struggle not only of Mexico but throughout Latin America and the Global South as the control of natural resources, biodiversity, water, land, and life itself is contested (B. Santos, 2005).

Socio-environmental conflicts express, in a clear though complex manner, the antagonistic relationship or outright conflict between plunder by predatory capitalism and the defense undertaken by those who are affected by it—the defense of communal goods against dispossession brought about by privatization (Navarro, 2012). We understand "communal" as everyday human cooperation expressed by collective social practices not subject to the logic of the market and "plunder" as the expropriation of communal goods via strategies the most visible of which is extractivism. The antagonism reflects the fact that what is communal exists as a denial of capital (Navarro, 2012). The use of the term "socio-environmental" underlines the social elements in the production of the environment, which is the expression of the relationship between society, culture, and nature in a given context. In truth, any environmental conflict is also a social conflict in that, as Tetreault, Ochoa, and Hernández (2012: 15) point out, any conflict is social.

Environmental justice (Ascelard, 2004: 16), "environmental rationality" (Leff, 2004), or "the environmentalism of the poor" (Martínez Alier, 2004) is a new iconic mode of the collective struggle against dispossession deployed for the first time about 500 years ago by peoples, communities, and other sectors of society suffering the consequences of colonialism. It is a historical continuation of social injustice (Alimonda, 2011). However, the current devastation is alarming because of new, intensive extractive technologies, deregulation, and the structural adjustment policies promoted by states in the interest of corporate capital and the expansion of economic borders designed by neoliberalism, all during a period of global crisis given the decline of hydrocarbons as engines of the global economy (Svampa, 2012).

In addition, we have the emergence of a planetary consciousness regarding the global ecological crisis, which has already left its pernicious tracks everywhere on the planet, driving us to acknowledge the finitude of its

wealth and the irreversibility of the key ecological processes that govern life. In fact, the speed of global environmental devastation questions the renewability of so-called strategic resources such as drinkable water, animal and plant species, forests, and fertile soil. Contemporary antagonisms between the communal and the private are increasing as we approach a threshold: the planetary depletion of the strategic resources for capital accumulation and the survival of modern societies (Chesnais, 2013; Foster, Clark, and York, 2013); hence the emergence and importance of social and environmental struggles.

SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES

Struggles for environmental justice and those waging them base their varied strategies of resistance on a nonmonetary valorization of the world that surrounds them. Nature is conceived as outside of commercial rationality. The complexity of these struggles arises from the fact that they are driven by a network of very diverse actors (indigenous movements, farmers, fishermen, rural communities, urban and suburban neighborhoods, intellectuals and artists, academics, the youth, women, and nongovernmental organizations, among others) who construct and employ a concept of nature, the land, and life that is diametrically opposed to the one deployed by nation-states and transnational networks. These evaluations have very different (and sometimes contrasting) content given the great heterogeneity of themes and issues (problems caused by mining, hydraulic and tourism-related megaprojects, agribusiness, urban developments, road infrastructure, nature conservation, changes in land use, transportation, etc.) and of their cultural, political, and territorial contexts (Gudynas, 2011; 2014). To this we must add the fact that collective action is deployed through a nested scale of social networks that include, in addition to local or community-based ones, others that range from the municipal to the global in organizational capacity (Svampa, 2012). As Gudynas (2014) points out, their dynamics are also quite diverse in terms of the degree and type of conflict (low-, medium-, or high-intensity) and the power relations they construct in counterhegemonic space/time.

Despite this vast structural and process-related heterogeneity, socio-environmental conflicts have common traits that are determined by a common discursive resistance and collective practices against extractivism. They employ similar value-based systems that constitute what is called environmental justice, environmental thought, and popular environmentalism. Their political practices are horizontal, since their organization is based on civil society—formed from the bottom up and outside political parties (Gudynas, 2014; Svampa, 2012). In general, organization and consensus lie in the assembly, building counterhegemonic and alternative knowledge through what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009) calls the ecology of knowledge. In fact, they give credibility to and validate other epistemologies of the South (B. Santos, 2011). The diversity of practices includes lawsuits, forcible seizure of spaces, public protests, manifestos, street confrontations, cultural events, and hunger strikes. Their creativity and forcefulness mean that these political subjects have

become a serious obstacle for capital inasmuch as they delay or even manage to cancel extractivist projects (Svampa, 2011).

Members of such movements demand the right to life, health, healthy diet, education, and sovereignty and the defense of original, inherited, or granted lands (Gonçalves, 2001; 2009)—life-or-death territories. A careful reading of their discourses and practices reveals that the background of these disputes includes an ethos or feeling of belonging. Thus Milton Santos (2005) has called for the return of territory. While the plunder that underlies this new cycle of accumulation is multiple, doing away with all or much of the communal legacy in places inhabited by very different populations (biocultural goods, including the aesthetic and the symbolic), it is territory and territoriality—the time/space-constrained expressions of the identities of people, families, and groups—that are put into play. Conflicts ignite local sensibilities about the value and importance of territory and territoriality, assigning them new meanings as icons of these struggles. Thus Maristella Svampa (2012) calls the claims of these movements an "eco-territorial twist" that leads to environmental thought. All this is part of the pursuit of alternatives to development or, as Arturo Escobar (2005) puts it, "post-development," adding new symbolism to the concept of sustainability in terms of the experience of the communal or social and at the same time dismantling the mask of eco-efficiency promulgated by the so-called green economy of neo-extractivism. The defense of territory and territoriality is the most visible programmatic feature of the varied environmental struggles and movements of Mexico and Latin America. In Mexico this reflexivity and collective action are characterized by the singular fact that this territory and the peoples that inhabit it are bioculturally the second-most-diverse in the world. The biocultural context animates the socio-environmental conflicts (Toledo, Boege, and Barrera-Bassols, 2010).

Drawing on all of the above, this essay offers an eco-political perspective on three processes that are inextricably connected: (1) a remarkable increase in socio-environmental conflicts, (2) the proliferation and maturation of citizen, communal, or collective resistance, and (3) an increase in environmental violence. In this way we contribute to a subject that, despite its importance, has hardly been analyzed on a national level (see Ochoa García, 2012; Tetreault et al., 2012).

Political ecology is not a consolidated field of knowledge but an area under construction. It attempts to analyze these conflicts from a perspective that articulates the relationships between nature and human beings with social relations themselves. It emerged with great force during the 1990s, a fact reflected in the appearance of journals on the subject in the United Kingdom (*Capitalism, Nature, Socialism, The Ecologist*), the United States (*Journal of Political Ecology*), Spain (*Ecología Política*), France (*Journal de Écologie Politique*), Italy (*Capitalismo, Natura, Socialismo*), Greece (*Democracy and Nature)*, India (*Down to Earth*), and Australia (*Nature and Society*). The number of scholars in this hybrid discipline has grown in recent years, and some of them have undertaken theoretical reflections (Garrido-Peña, 1996; Toledo, 1983). However, contributions in this area are often confused with those of environmental and ecological economics, political anthropology, agroecology, and other hybrid disciplines (see Delgado, 2013; Durand, Figueroa, and Guzmán, 2012). As in the rest of the

world, political ecology has expanded in Latin America, especially in disputes in rural areas over the use of natural resources (Alimonda, 2002; 2006; Toledo, 1992; 1996).

From an eco-political perspective, a useful theoretical framework analyzes the relationships among the three most significant branches of all societies: political power, represented by the parties and governments resulting from a representative or formal democracy; economic power, represented by companies, corporations, and markets; and social power, represented by citizens (communities, associations, cooperatives, trade unions, professional organizations, etc.). This "three-part model" (Cohen and Arato, 1994) has been intensely discussed by political scientists, philosophers, and anthropologists; it is not new but has been recontextualized in the landscape of the global socio-ecological crisis (for details see Toledo, 2010).

SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS IN MEXICO

Mexico suffers from a dozen major ecological problems (Toledo, 2012), and most of these involve the generation of socio-environmental conflicts. These conflicts are usually brought about by the activities of companies or corporations (national and transnational) or public policies designed to encourage the private sector and opposed by organized citizenship or rural and urban communities. In response, government agencies are usually on the side of the corporations or remain neutral. The recording and analysis of these conflicts highlight both the companies and corporations that prey on these resources and natural processes and the organizations that protect and defend them.

The following panorama is based on a review of the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* undertaken between September 2009 and March 2014, with added news from other media. This review allowed us to characterize 10 major types of socio-environmental conflict: agricultural, biotechnological, energy-related, forestry-related, hydraulic, mining-related, hazardous waste–related, tourism-related, and urban. Each type of conflict has repercussions on different scales, involves different kinds of social actors, and has a certain geographical distribution (Table 1).

Agricultural conflicts are closely linked to pollution by agro-chemicals and pesticides and to other modalities related to the overexploitation of water sources, the channeling of water to cities and industries, the introduction of transgenic crops, and soil erosion. In a country dominated by small-scale production and traditional Mesoamerican agricultural modalities, the conversion to ecologically inappropriate agro-industrial forms already potentially entails a conflict.

Biotechnological conflicts are the work of mainly three corporations—Monsanto, Dupont, and Pioneer—that, with government authorization, have planted experimental fields with genetically modified (transgenic) maize in Mexico, which is the birthplace of this cereal. This is highly risky given that numerous native varieties of this grain that constitute the basis of the Mexican diet may become endangered. To date, 195 experiments with modified maize have taken place in the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Tamaulipas.

TABLE 1
Socio-environmental Conflicts by Category and Number of Municipalities Affected

Type of Conflict	*Number of Municipalities Affected*	*States Affected*
Agricultural	8	Aguascalientes, Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Estado de México, Michoacán, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Yucatán, Zacatecas
Biotechnological	18	Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Yucatán
Energy-related	52	Baja California, Campeche, Chihuahua, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Morelos, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Veracruz
Forestry-related	19	Chiapas, Coahuila, Distrito Federal, Durango, Guerrero, Jalisco, Estado de México, Michoacán
Hydraulic	65	Chihuahua, Coahuila, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Estado de México, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Querétaro, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, Veracruz
Mining-related	79	Aguascalientes, Baja California Sur, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Colima, Durango, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Sonora, Veracruz, Zacatecas
Hazardous wastes-related	14	Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Estado de México, Oaxaca
Tourism-related	17	Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Jalisco, Estado de México, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Veracruz
Urban	26	Colima, Distrito Federal, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Estado de México, Michoacán, Morelos, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí

At the time of the preparation of this essay, the government, after several years of debate, was about to authorize the commercial planting of at least 2.6 million hectares of modified maize (Barrera-Bassols et al., 2009).

Mexico's possible entry into the commercial cultivation of genetically modified maize has triggered a strong reaction across communities and regions in many parts of the country. The number of local peasant and indigenous organizations has grown from 18 in 1999 to around 80. Oaxaca, Guerrero, Yucatán, Chiapas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, and Puebla, among other states, have experienced an increase in the number of collective resistance movements in recent years. Yucatán is a significant example: in 2012 there were 14 maize fairs—popular celebrations, mainly in rural communities, that honor maize as a primordial symbol rooted in the Mesoamerican worldview as the life giver of humans and nonhumans and that are now emblematic of popular struggles against genetically modified organisms—in an equal number of Mayan communities. In Oaxaca, too, resistance has multiplied around

a state organization in defense of the territories and towns engaged in active struggle. There is also a clear overlap of places where contamination by transgenic plants has been found with areas with a great density of races and varieties of native maize in or near indigenous territories, usually in the mountains, or in areas of subsistence maize production and with mixed population (see http://www.uccs.mx). The main actors in these resistance movements are indigenous peoples, indigenous women, and mestizo peasants. However, there are also urban, scientific, and/or academic groups such as the Unión de Científicos Comprometidos con la Sociedad, Sin Maíz No Hay País, the Red en Defensa Nacional del Maíz, Greenpeace, El Barzón, La Magia de Mi Pueblo, the Frente Democrático Campesino, the Unión de Pueblos de Morelos, and dozens more. There are robust relations between NGOs, academics, activists, and local organizations all over the country and legal action seeking to stop the introduction of genetically modified maize and soybeans, and the problem is being considered by various academic institutions (see Alvarez-Buylla and Piñeyro-Nelson, 2013).

Energy-related disputes are taking place in 10 states. These are due to the presence or prospect of thermoelectric projects, hydroelectric dams, wind farms, and nuclear power plants. The companies or corporations involved include two state-owned enterprises, Petróleos Mexicanos (Mexican Petrol—PEMEX) and the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (Federal Electricity Commission—CFE), the Mexican companies Energía Costa Azul, Comexhidro, and Demex, and transnationals such as Elecnor, Abengoa, Conduit Capital Power, Sempra Energy, Mareña Renovables, Mitsubishi Corporation, Iberdrola, Windpower, Gaya, and General Motors. The damage caused by this type of mega project includes the destruction of ecosystems, the dying out of fauna, the drying up of aquifers, the flooding of human settlements, damage to residential areas, land dispossession, and the introduction of diseases into neighboring communities. There are many organizations opposed to this type of project, including the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua de Morelos, Puebla y Tlaxcala, the Alianza Mexicana por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos, the Asamblea de los Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo de Tehuantepec en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio, the Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Zona Norte del Istmo, the Comité de Defensa Integral de Derechos Humanos Gobixha, Terra Peninsular, the Comité de Pueblos Unidos en Defensa de Rio Verde, the Red Manglar México, the Unidad Indígena Totonaca Náhuatl, and Tiyot Tlali.

Twelve states have hydraulic conflicts—conflicts over the construction of aqueducts and dams. These also include effects involving water pollution, the overexploitation of aquifers, and poor distribution. Companies involved include Abengoa, Malova, Aguas de Ramos Arizpe, and CFE (all Mexican) and Aguas de Barcelona (foreign). Defense organizations include the Frente Democrático Campesino de Chihuahua, the Observatorio Ciudadano Cuenca Amanalco Valle de Bravo, Defensores del Agua del Desierto Chihuahuense, the Movimiento Mexicano de Afectados por Presas y en Defensa de los Ríos, Frente Ecológico en Defensa de la Laguna de Zacapú, Fasol, Pro Regiones, Niuwari, the Comité de Defensa Movimiento Campesino de Anahuac, the Coalición de Comunidades y Ejidos del Valle del Yaqui en Sonora, and the Comité Ciudadano de Defensa Ambiental de El Salto.

Nine states are affected by tourism-related conflicts. For the most part these affect mangroves, reefs, and marine fauna, but there are also "ecotourism projects" that strip land from communities or threaten their access to water sources. The corporations involved include Grupo Martinon, Grupo Mexicano de Desarrollo, Grupo Vidanta, and Spanish banks such as Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo and Caja de Valencia. Defense groups include Alcosta, the Alianza para la Sustentabilidad del Noroeste Costero, Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo, the Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, the Comité Ciudadano en Defensa de Puerto Marqués, and the Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente.

Urban conflicts usually arise because of projected highways, real estate megaprojects, and even supermarkets. Among the better-known are the citizen reaction against the Supervía project in southern Mexico City, the Morelia mega-tunnel, the intended drilling in the Cerro de la Silla in Monterrey, and the protests against the expansion of the Cuernavaca-Cuautla highway in Morelos. Most of these conflicts occur in the center of the country and, more recently, in Quintana Roo, with the Dragon Mart project in Cancún.

The largest number of conflicts has to do with mining (Delgado, 2010). During the past two administrations, mining concessions have increased enormously. In Oaxaca, for example, 344 concessions were issued between 2002 and 2011, representing almost 8 percent of the nation's territory, and some are valid until 2062 (*La Jornada*, February 16, 2013). On a national scale, it is estimated that a quarter of the national territory (more than 50 million hectares) has been leased to mining companies as a result of government actions taken during the past decade. By May 2013, 287 concessions had been approved; 207 of them were for Canadian transnational companies and the rest for British, American, Australian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Mexican companies that are extracting gold, silver, copper, and other metals at virtually no cost, taking over community territories while polluting their water, land, and air. Toxic emissions from mining constitute 70 percent of the total registered on a national level, mainly involving lead, hydrogen sulfide, cadmium, chromium, nickel, and cyanide. Every gram of gold or copper extracted also requires an enormous expenditure of water.

Today there are at least 79 conflicts generated by mining across 18 states (Table 2). These include cases in which mining extraction causes pollution, the spread of disease to nearby communities, the displacement of families, poor working conditions for employees, or failure to comply with agreements previously established with communities. They also include cases in which concessions issued to mining companies have led to protests seeking to prevent mining exploitation from getting started. This activity is plundering the country's mineral resources and enriching only the companies and corporations with enough capital to carry it out, leaving the country or local communities with little compared with the profits obtained from mining. It causes two kinds of destruction: one is natural, usually destroying ecosystems near the mines in a way that cannot be remedied, and the other is cultural, in which entire communities have to change their ways and may even see their ancestral traditions threatened. Today there are more than 50 corporations

TABLE 2
Locations of Mining-related Conflicts

State	*Municipalities*
Aguascalientes	Asientos
Baja California Sur	La Paz, Los Cabos, Mulege
Chiapas	Chicomuselo, Escuintla, Frontera Comalapa, Ixhuatá
Chihuahua	Batopilas, Buenaventura, Chinipas, Guzapares, Madera, Ocampo, Urique
Coahuila	Escobedo
Colima	Comala, Manzanillo
Durango	Mapimi, Tlahuililo
Guerrero	Acapulco, Cocula, Costa Chica, Iliatenco, La Montaña, Malinaltepec, San Luis Acatlán, Tlacoapa, Zapotitlán Tablas
Hidalgo	Apaxco, Santiago de Anaya
Jalisco	Cuautitlán de García Barragán
Michoacán	Angangueo, Aquila, Lázaro Cárdenas
Morelos	Temixco
Oaxaca	Capulalpan de Méndez, Ixtlan de Juárez, Magdalena Teitipac, Ocotlá de Morelos, San Andrés Solaga, San Francisco Cajonos, San José del Progreso, San Juan Chicomezuchil, San Juan Tabaa, San Mateo Cajonos, San Pedro Yaneri, Santa Catarina Lachatao, Santa María Yavesia, Santa María Zaniza, Santiago Amatlán, Santiago Zoochila, Tanetze de Zaragoza, Tlacolula de Matamoros, Villa Talea de Castro
Puebla	Cuetzalan del Progreso, Guadalupe Victoria, Libres, Tetela de Ocampo, Tlatlauquitepec, Zacapoauxtla, Zautla
Querétaro	Plazuelas
San Luis Potosí	Catorce, Cerro de San Pedro, Charcas, Santa María del Río, Santo Domingo, Vanegas
Sonora	Cananea, Soyopa
Veracruz	Alto Lucero, Actopan
Zacatecas	Chalchihuites, Concepción del Oro, Luis Moya, Mazapil, Morelos

engaged in mining, and a similar number of civil organizations are resisting these extractive projects.

CITIZEN RESISTANCE

There are dozens of essentially rural environmental resistance movements, primarily in the indigenous regions of the country. Mexico has 14.9 million citizens who identify themselves as indigenous and live across 26 indigenous areas, mainly in the Center, South, and Southeast. These regions contain more than a quarter of the nation's water, areas of great biodiversity, and many of the remaining forests and preserve the country's main phytogenetic resources: maize and 100 other species of domesticated plants (Boege, 2008). If to the above we add the territories of mestizo farmers, many of whom resemble indigenous ones except that they do not speak any language other than Spanish,

TABLE 3
National Networks of Environmentalist Resistance

Network	*Membership*	*Address*
REMA		
Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería	41 organizations	http://rema.codigosur.net
MAPDER		
Movimiento Mexicano de Afectados por las Presas y en Defensa de los Ríos	50 organizations	http://mapder.codigosur.net
COMDA		
Coalición de Organizaciones Mexicanas por el Derecho al Agua	18 organizations	http://www.comda.org.mx
RAPAM		
Red de Acción sobre Plaguicidas y Alternativas en México	10 organizations, 300 sympathizers	http://www.caata.org/main_page.html
ANAA		
Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales	130 organizations	http://www.afectadosambientales.org/
RITA		
Red Indígena de Turismo Alternativo	32 organizations	http://www.rita.com.mx
GEMA		
Red de Género y Medio Ambiente	30 organizations	http://redgeneroymedioambiente.org.mx
RETMOR		
Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos	20 markets, 1,136 members	http://www.mercadosorganicos.org.mx

the panorama widens. While indigenous peoples have 28 million hectares in virtually all the ecological zones of the country (Boege, 2008), 30,000 ejidos and communities hold more than half of the nation's territory, 106 million hectares (Robles-Berlanga and Concheiro, 2004). Peasant resistance echoes the early twentieth-century agrarian revolution, which accomplished two things: the restitution of the land to the peasantry and a revival of the memory of the Mesoamerican civilization. Therefore, these environmental battles involve a simultaneous defense of nature, territory, culture, historical memory, collective life, and communal self-management.

Socio-environmental struggles take two major forms: (1) defensive resistance, which seeks to prevent destructive projects, and (2) promotion of projects that pose an alternative to the dominant model. On a national scale, resistance is organized into eight major networks that bring together almost 300 regional organizations (Table 3) and include those that oppose mining, pesticide use, or dams and defend water sources and alternative tourism. The Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales (National Assembly for the Environmentally Affected—ANAA) is the organization with the largest presence. It was founded in 2006 and today includes more than 130 organizations. Its ninth assembly, held in Guanajuato in November 2013, was attended by about 1,000 participants. The struggles over alternative projects are usually linked to production or services and involve a solid and permanent

organization, information and scientific and technological knowledge, administrative infrastructure, and marketing avenues outside the world dominated by neoliberalism. They have to do with the creation of alternative modes of interacting with nature and new ways of producing, circulating, transforming, and consuming. Since they are based on principles and values antithetical to capital, such as cooperation, solidarity, collective or communal accumulation of wealth, unlimited respect for natural processes, participatory democracy, and organic fair trade, the challenges are of a different nature. Among these struggles are those of the fishing cooperatives of Baja California and Quintana Roo, the communities of the tropical and temperate forests, and the organic shade-grown-coffee cooperatives, of which there are more than 100 in Chiapas alone. An estimated 1,040 alternative initiatives and projects have emerged in Quintana Roo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Chiapas, and Michoacán (Toledo and Ortiz-Espejel, 2014).

THE NEOLIBERAL STATE'S ANTI-ENVIRONMENTALISM (2006–2012)

The primordial cause of the ecological crisis on every level, including climate change, is a model that seeks to commercialize natural processes, exploiting what has been called "natural capital." This reality has been masked by a policy of making rhetorical commitments and irrelevant concessions while facilitating large predatory projects. As in many countries, wearing the "green" mask has become a common practice. Corporations, companies, governments, and scientific elites court each other, are awarded prizes, become accomplices, keep silent, and end up being part of a vicious circle. This was especially noticeable during the last presidential administration (2006–2012). From the start, President Felipe Calderón learned to handle a discourse that was "painted green," but his first act was to reduce the Ministry of the Environment's budget by 21 percent. Internationally, he was always in tune with "green capitalism," seeking to make business out of each and every ecological issue. Organizing the Business for the Environment Global Summit in October 2010 won him the United Nations Program for the Environment's Champions of the Earth award in 2011 and the Ecology and Environment Award of the Miguel Alemán Valdés Foundation, but at the same time he promoted and facilitated large-scale ecologically destructive policies on six major fronts: open-cast mining, hydraulic, touristic, urban, and commercial megaprojects, energy, and food production.

Although Calderón is responsible for the passage of a general climate-change law, he did nothing to stop the agro-industrial model that produces 28 percent of greenhouse gases on a global scale. Export-oriented monoculture based on agrochemicals, pesticides, waste of water, and high energy costs became the central goal of federal agricultural and forestry policy. Support for sovereign agro-ecology aimed at food self-sufficiency and the encouragement of traditional producers was minimal, although Mexico was a pioneer in this global field. Although his government launched a program for power-saving light bulbs, all policy in this sector was based on fossil energy and sought to delegate production to private national and transnational companies, ignoring the prospects for renewable energy.

TABLE 4
Environmentalists Murdered, 2006–2013

Environmentalist	*Organization*	*Conflict*	*Place*	*Date*
Francisco Quiñones	Community	Peña Colorada mining	Jalisco	11/3/2006
Aldo Zamora	Community	Defense of the Zempoala Lagoons	Morelos and Estado de México	2007
Fernando Mayén	Community		Jilotzingo, Estado de México	2008
Miguel Ángel Pérez Cázales	Community	Defense of a protected natural area	Santa Catarina, Morelos	10/31/2009
Mariano Abarca	Frente Cívico de Chicomuselo	Blackfire mining	Chicomuselo, Chiapas	11/27/2009
Beatriz Cariño	CACTUS	Various	Oaxaca	4/27/2010
Rubén Flores Hernández	Community	Forest defense	Coajomulco, Morelos	4/28/2010
Bernardo Méndez Vázquez	Consejo de Pueblos Unidos del Valle de Ocotlán	Fortune Silver Mines mining	San José del Progreso, Oaxaca	1/18/2012
Bernardo Vázquez Sánchez	Consejo de Pueblos Unidos del Valle de Ocotlán	Fortune Silver Mines mining	San José del Progreso, Oaxaca	3/15/2012
12 commune members	Community	Forest defense	Cherán, Michoacán	2011–2012
Javier Torres Cruz	Organización de Campesinos Ecologistas	Forest defense	Sierra de Petatlán, Guerrero	4/18/2012
Juan García Xingu, Bernardo Sánchez Venegas, Valentin Reyes García, and Isidro Luna Alonso	PROFEPA, CONANP, and commune	Mina La Guitarra, owned by Genco Resources	Temascaltepec, Estado de México	5/20/2012
Rubén Santana Alonso, Sergio Santana Villa, Martin N. and Gilberto Islas	Ejido La Laguna	Forest defense		2012
María Edy Fabiola Orozco	Guerreros Verdes	Defense of the Coyuca Lagoon	Guerrero	5/31/2012
Silvia Espinoza and Jonathan González	Frente de Defensa del Agua	Water sources defense	Cuautla, Morelos	October 2007
Eva Alarcón and Marcial Bautista	Organización de Campesinos Ecologistas	Forest defense	Petatlán, Guerrero	2011
Ismael Solorio and Manuela Martha Solís	El Barzón	Against mining	Chihuahua	10/23/2012
Alfredo Cruz Luna	Community of Coyotepec	Water defense	Edomex	2013

Sources: Hernández-Navarro (2011); *La Jornada*, December 26, 2012 and October 7, 2013.

All these conflicts generate not just social tensions but also victims, human beings deprived of life. An on-site defense of nature inevitably means confronting the forces of capital: local or regional logging groups, megaprojects, giant mining companies, and energy or water corporations. Every environmental conflict is a battle between private or corporate interests and the well-being of

citizens, who become nature's spokespeople, advocates, and activists, and in these battles the state almost always takes the side of the former in the name of "progress," "modernization," and "development." When the interests of economic gain fail to corrupt lawyers, judges, mayors, and state and federal officials or divide resisting communities, there is a last resort: jail, kidnappings, death threats, and the assassination of leaders, defense attorneys, and even honest public servants (Table 4). The death toll is rising. Most of the victims are rural people, peasant and indigenous, but some are members of environmental organizations and even government officials working in favor of environmental protection and conservation.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of all of the above, these environmental resistance movements and their geopolitical representation present a hopeful picture in their enormous organizational potential. The challenge is to articulate these hundreds of movements and, above all, channel them into a great force that can not only resist the ravages of capital but build social power based on an alternative modernity, one that no longer imitates dominant forms of conceiving nature, production, circulation, consumption, and ways of looking at the world and that retrieves the history, culture, and memory of the people. This is happening not only in Mexico but also across much of Latin America. It calls for clarification and theoretical discussions capable of offering clear, specific formulas for the construction of social power translated into productive, financial, legal, technological, and cultural projects outside and against the order ruled by capital.

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